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Sergeant Klay South



COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: October 14, 2009
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington
St., Room 431
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 1

Members Present: Sen. Thomas Wyss, Chairperson; Sen. Frank Mrvan; Sen. Richard Young; Rep. Scott Reske; Rep. Vern Tincher; Rep. Edmond Soliday; Carol L. Riley; John Dahman; Lt. General Carol Mutter; Sergeant Klay South.

Members Absent: Sen. Allen Paul; Rep. Richard McClain.

Senator Thomas Wyss (Chairperson) called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Members and staff of the Commission on Military and Veterans' Affairs (Commission) introduced themselves.

Camp Atterbury-Muscatatuck Center for Complex Operations

Brigadier General Cliff Tooley provided the members of the Commission a PowerPoint presentation. (Exhibit 1). General Tooley described the various missions and facilities of

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the Atterbury-Muscatatuck Center for Complex Operations (Center). By 2012, the Center will create over 3,000 jobs and have a fiscal impact on the community of over \$600 million. The Center is unique in the Department of Defense because it operates under a business plan. Also, the Center is jointly controlled by the various components of the armed forces and certain government agencies. It is used as an interagency training ground. The various entities contribute equally to the financial resources of the Center.

General Tooley described the Patriot Academy (Academy). The Academy is a military school for high school drop outs. The Academy is located at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center (MUTC). The Academy will enroll over 2,000 students in the next few years. The Academy anticipates enrollment of about 500 students next year. The students are recruited from all across the country. The program will be regionalized throughout the United States if it is successful at the MUTC.

General Tooley then described the Advanced Urban Operations Training Facility. He described the facility's use by first responders. The facility is also used for village training, special operations training, and collapsed building training. The MUTC has also been designated as an urban training facility by the Department of Defense.

General Tooley described the various construction plans for the MUTC. He indicated that major construction will begin this year.

Operation Diploma

Shelly MacDermid Wadsworth, Professor at Purdue University, provided the Commission members a PowerPoint presentation concerning Operation Diploma. (Exhibit 2). Professor MacDermid Wadsworth described the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI). The MFRI is a research and outreach organization based at Purdue University. The MFRI is supported by the Lilly Endowment and the Department of Defense. The mission of the MFRI is to conduct studies that provide insight into the experiences of military members and their families, and to design and implement outreach activities that assist military families.

Professor MacDermid Wadsworth indicated that the new GI Bill creates an economic development incentive in states losing jobs. After October 1, 2009, veterans can transfer some of their academic benefits to dependents and can receive four academic years of educational benefits. The anticipated result is an increased number of students on two and four year college campuses using the GI Bill.

Historically, 70% of the nation's veterans have attended college. Since 9/11, more than 35,000 Hoosiers have served or are currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Professor MacDermid Wadsworth indicated this means that there are 24,500 potential students who could attend Indiana schools. The potential revenue from these students could total \$1.078 billion.

Professor MacDermid Wadsworth indicated that there are many resources available to assist veterans in accessing and using financial assistance structures. However, in spite of these financial resources being available, students can experience delays or disruption in their pursuit of higher education because of difficulties assessing benefits and because of multiple deployments. Only about eight percent of veterans use their full benefits.

Operation Diploma was created to assist student service members and veterans as they transition from combat to the classroom. The goals of Operation Diploma include the following:

- (1) Educating institutions about the needs and concerns of student service members and veterans.
- (2) Engaging institutions in strengthening support and services for these students.
- (3) Enriching the efforts of student veteran organizations (SVOs) across the state.
- (4) Generating new knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and about effective strategies for helping them.

Professor MacDermid Wadsworth indicated that corporate partners have volunteered to provide mentors to SVOs throughout the academic year. She indicated that there has been a lot of creativity and collaboration with the various state institutions to address the concerns of student members and veterans.

Eric Dietz, Associate Professor at Purdue University, described Purdue University's role in implementing Operation Diploma. Mr. Dietz distributed a brochure to Commission members. (Exhibit 3). He indicated that the Purdue University, School of Technology, is conducting outreach to various SVOs and veteran's organizations to make veterans aware of the benefits they are entitled to receive under the GI Bill.

Lieutenant General Mutter asked Professor MacDermid Wadsworth whether there was a clearinghouse for veterans to learn about scholarships or grants that may be available. Professor MacDermid Wadsworth responded that there was not a clearinghouse at this time but thought that it would be a good idea.

Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs Update

Tom Applegate, Director, Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs, presented a PowerPoint presentation. (Exhibit 4). He explained that 91 Indiana counties have Veterans' Service Officers (CVSOs). The CVSOs help account for an annual flow of almost \$604 million in VA compensation and pension money to Indiana veterans.

Mr. Applegate described the Military Family Relief Fund (MRF). The MRF's assets totaled \$3,382,674 on October 6, 2009. The MRF has assisted 165 families. The MRF is funded by proceeds from the Hoosier Veteran and Support Our Troops license plates.

Mr. Applegate then described the Veterans' Affairs Trust Fund (VATF). The goal of the VATF is to provide a self-sustaining funding source for the MRF. Although the VATF is not funded by the General Assembly, undesignated money from the MRF may be transferred to the VATF. The Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs is currently working with a budget analyst to develop a trust.

Mr. Applegate discussed the Indiana Veterans' Home (Home). There are currently 265 residents at the Home. The Home will be spending approximately \$3 million of economic stimulus money on various rehabilitation and repair projects. The Home will use \$1,738,000 of the economic stimulus money to demolish unsalvageable buildings.

Mr. Applegate suggested certain legislative proposals pertaining to the Home. He suggested that the General Assembly make changes to the Indiana Code to shorten the length of time an individual must be a resident of Indiana to be admitted to the Home. He also suggested that individuals who entered the service from Indiana but now reside in another state should be allowed admittance to the Home.

In addition, Mr Applegate suggested that oversight of certain historic buildings at the Home

be transferred from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs. The Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs currently oversees these buildings through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Mr Applegate provided an overview of the Indiana Veterans' Memorial Cemetery.

Mr. Applegate discussed the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs role as a state approving agency. Veterans can only utilize their military education benefits in programs approved by the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs. Statewide, the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs helps account for an annual flow of over \$41 million in VA educational benefits for Indiana veterans and their dependents.

Mr. Applegate discussed various benefits Indiana veterans may receive from the state.

Mr. Applegate described various veteran related license plates offered in Indiana. He then stated that the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs would like to see legislation combining the class II disabled veteran license plate with the class I disabled license plate and renaming it the "Disabled Hoosier Veteran" license plate.

Service Organization Presentations

Paul Curtis, representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) testified before the Commission. He described the various services his organization provides to Indiana veterans. The VFW often makes presentations at demobilization briefings to inform service members of state and federal benefits. The VFW also offers a Military Assistance Program to provide service members with financial assistance for certain financial hardships. The VFW also will represent veterans in service disability appeals with the Veterans Administration.

Tony Craig, representing the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), testified before the Commission. The DAV's mission is to build better lives for disabled veterans and their families. Mr. Craig distributed a handout to the Commission members summarizing the DAV's monthly activities and the amount of assistance the organization helped disabled veterans receive. (Exhibit 5). The DAV provides many of the same services as the VFW to disabled veterans.

The Chairperson recognized John Hickey of the American Legion. Mr. Hickey indicated that over the last year, the American Legion has conducted approximately 776 client interviews in Indiana. The American Legion assists veterans with service disability appeals and claims. They also participate in employment fairs and offer direct financial assistance programs to veterans. The American Legion has about 400 posts in Indiana with volunteer service officers. These service officers direct veterans to various resources. Also, the American Legion has programs to assist homeless veterans.

Mr. Hickey indicated that the American Legion has donated \$27,000 to the Home. The American Legion also donated approximately \$500,000 to the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's Home before it was closed.

LaMonte Crenshaw, representing AMVETS, testified before the Commission. He stressed to Commission members that veterans are members of the community and the community should help veterans in need. He explained that veterans' organizations are not competing against each other.

The Commission members expressed gratitude for the work provided by the various

service organizations.

The Commission members discussed touring the Camp Atterbury-Muscatatuck Center for Complex Operations on October 29, 2009. The Chairperson indicated that he will inquire into the feasibility of the visit and will get back to Commission members.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:40 p.m.